

Media release

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Industry recognition for empowering customers

Essential Energy's approach to involving customers in developing its funding submission to the Australian Energy Regulator (AER) was recognised as a best practice model last night, winning the 2018 Energy Network Consumer Engagement Award at the annual Energy Networks Australia dinner in Canberra.

General Manager Strategy, Regulation and Transformation, Chantelle Bramley, said that the industry recognition acknowledged the amount and calibre of work that went into Essential Energy's comprehensive consultation.

"Every five years, Essential Energy submits a Regulatory Proposal to the Australian Energy Regulator that outlines how it will build, operate and maintain the electricity network and proposed network charges for customers," said Ms Bramley.

"As part of Essential Energy's preparation for its 2019-24 Proposal, we developed an extensive Customer and Stakeholder Engagement Program to share and gather information, insights and feedback from our customers so that we could be confident our proposal reflected customer needs and expectations.

"It makes sense to engage the people who use our network and genuinely involve them in decisions that will affect them."

Essential Energy Head of Stakeholder Engagement, Roger Marshall, said that as an economic enabler for regional, rural and remote NSW, Essential Energy needed to ensure it was listening and responding to the customers at the centre of the business.

"We looked outside the business to seek customer views and expectations and ensured we were consistent and open to feedback at all times," said Mr Marshall.

"We consulted more than 3,000 customers, and welcomed the opportunity to listen to their views, engage in relevant discussions and incorporate their feedback in how we shaped our proposal to the regulator. What we heard was that affordability and reliability were key concerns."

Mr Marshall said the initial engagement took place over three phases between June 2016 and March 2018, with a fourth phase in November 2018.

"When surveyed, more than 80 per cent of residential and business customers told us they'd been satisfied with Essential Energy's engagement activities, and we received positive feedback from customer advocacy representatives for our industry."

Ms Bramley said Essential Energy's Stakeholder Engagement Framework set out a clear methodology for research and analysis, informed by the International Association of Public Participation, the AER's own Stakeholder Engagement Framework (2017), and CSIRO and Energy Networks Association's 2016 Electricity Transformation Roadmap: Customer Engagement Handbook.

"Evaluation and learnings from the Program have informed future planning and sparked a fresh understanding of customer groups, allowing us to tailor our services to meet their needs in a rapidly changing energy landscape."

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Essential Energy's footprint covers over 737,000 square kilometres of landmass with over 183,000 km of powerline and 1.3 million poles. The network has approximately 4.6 customers to fund each kilometre of powerline, which is almost one-tenth the customer density compared with our counterparts in NSW.